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ABSTRACT

In a semiotic study exploring whether the visibility of both ends in a dyadic interaction affected a third party's evaluation of the interactants, subjects evaluated two versions of six simulated employment interviews. The six male applicants for employment simulated overgesticulation, lack of adequate eye contact, moderate aggressiveness, kinesic stillness, fidgeting, and positive aggressiveness. The subjects serving as evaluators of the simulations were 42 undergraduate students and 36 professionals who had rated people as part of their work. Half of the raters saw the version with both the applicants and the interviewers on the screen, while the other half of the raters saw only the applicants. Observers' perceptions of many of the behaviors changed depending on whether the applicant was viewed alone or within his full interactional context. Physically seeing or not seeing the interviewer greatly influenced raters' perceptions of the interactant to be judged. Hearing the questions to which the applicant replied and knowing there was an interviewer in the actual event was not a sufficient condition for an equal evaluation of both functions. It was difficult to see how semiotic theory could handle the discrepancy in the perception of an identical sign. (RL)

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THE PERCEPTION OF NONVERBAL BEHAVIOR IN FUNCTION OF VISIBLE ACCESS TO ONE OR BOTH INTERACTANTS

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THEORY

Semiotics, broadly defined, is a method of discourse analysis aimed at discovering the deep meaning of the message. As this is generally achieved through structuralist methodology, a major problem of semiotic theory is the incorporation of external variables and their impact on the message. In the realm of the nonverbal component of discourse, Ekman's approach, in a strict sense, lies outside semiotic theory which favors the structuralist methodology championed by Birdwhistell. Sensu lato, however, the two opposing approaches to nonverbal research can be reconciled and may indeed be necessary for a complete understanding of the semiotic function in kinesics (von Raffler-Engel, 1978).

SCOPE

This paper falls within the Efron-Ekman paradigm but it focuses on an internal variation. We wanted to explore whether the visibility of both ends in a dyadic interaction affected the evaluation of the interactants by a third party, compared to the visibility of only one end at a time albeit with the clear contextual (and stated) understanding that the one end in view was participating in a dyadic conversation. The most naturalistic presentation of such an isolated end

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appeared to us the showing of a candidate being interviewed for a business position. In this particular situation it would not seem contrived that the camera had focused exclusively on the interviewee who was to be judged.

INSTRUMENT

Six white males of close range in age (the youngest being 22 and the oldest 26 years old), of similar physical build, and compatible educational and socio-economic background were video taped in a mock business interview situation with the same interviewer. The latter was impersonated by a white male in his late thirties, Prof. Kassian A. Kovalcheck, director of Forensics at Vanderbilt University. The verbal behavior of the applicants was virtually identical in language and content and varied as little as possible in paralanguage but their nonverbal behavior differed on one variable. The interviewer behaved in an identical manner throughout. Each taped session lasted three minutes.

To insure the virtual identity of the verbal component, each of the mock applicants was asked to read a short script (see Appendix I) before the taping. To preserve naturalness, he was instructed not to memorize the script but basically say the same things. The six interactions were taped on consecutive days and the interviewees had no occasion to meet at that time. Ideally we should have hired professional actors but this was financially out of the question. In regard to the nonverbal behavior to be portrayed by our volunteers we opted for what we considered the minor evil. Instead of giving rigid instructions to each applicant so that they all would behave in an almost identical manner except for the one variable which we wanted to isolate, we simply told them to behave naturally except for one specific nonverbal manifestation which they were to stress without overdoing it to the point of caricature. In this manner we thought to avoid a stilted, artificial behavior throughout the tape; and we believe that we have succeeded. From past experience in nonverbal testing we were fairly certain that the dependent variables which might compound the picture would be of minor concern given the overriding effect of the independent variable. (von Raffler-Engel, i.p.)

The variations in nonverbal behavior are as follows. The six video frames were shown in the order listed below with one

minute intervals between each frame to allow for rating time.

I. Overgesticulation. The applicant gesticulated almost constantly with his hands while he talked. The movements were appropriate but lacked the usual pauses.

II. Lack of adequate eye contact. The applicant only rarely established eye contact with the interviewer, looking "in the air" (as described by one observer) or downward.

III. Moderate aggressiveness. The applicant did all the "right" things (for a list of these see von Raffler-Engel 1980) but without forcefulness.

IV. Kinesic stillness. The applicant kept his body still except for occasional head nods and some small movements with his fingers.

V. Fidgeting. The applicant fidgeted nervously, used frequent self-adaptors and played with the elastic band of his wrist watch.

VI. Positive aggressiveness. The applicant did all the "right" things but with great forcefulness in the tensing of his body and the intensity of his gaze.

SUBJECTS

A total of 78 judges evaluated the tapes. Of these 42 were undergraduate students (M21/F21) and 36 were professionals (M19/F17) ranging in age from 23 to 68, mean 38.5 years. These professional raters were managers in department stores, and admissions officers in the graduate and professional schools of Vanderbilt University.

The subjects were classified into four catagories: student males, student females; professional males, and professional females. Each category was then randomely divided. Half of the raters saw the applicant and the interviewer on the screen while the other half saw only the applicant. The two versions of the tape had been prepared at the Vanderbilt University Learning Resources Center by using two cameras. One camera focused on the two interactants while the other camera covered only the applicant. In this manner the applicant alone is slightly larger than when he is seated across the office table with the interviewer. Whether the difference in size had any influence on the evaluation of his behavior we can not know. For lack of time we did not run a small test comparing two identical pictures varying only in size.

The subjects viewed the tape singly or in small homogen-

ious groups. The students saw it in regular classrooms. The professionals viewed the tape at their place of work. (For the junior author this frequently meant carrying the heavy portable video equipment all over Nashville, Tenn.) Each judge filled out a demographic data sheet indicating sex, age, and years of experience in interviewing (see Appendix II). After viewing each of the six frames the judges compiled a forced choice rating sheet evaluating the applicant on a set of personality and job related traits, and indicating whether he or she would hire/not hire him with/without reservations. (See Appendix III)

ANALYSIS

The test results were analyzed separately for each of the four categories, and for the students and the professionals as a whole as well as for all the women compared to all the men. The individual responses on the rating sheets were totalled for each question and comparisons were established on a percentile basis. (See Appendix IV for a sample of the analysis).

RESULTS

The results suggest the following typology in regard to nonverbal behavior when observed in an individual with or without the benefit of visual access to the other interactant.

(1) Non-interactional behavior. Behavior that is basically unrelated to the verbal behavior, or any other aspect of the ongoing conversational interaction. This behavior simply denotes an ego state and has no direct interactional function.

An example of this type is the fidgeting applicant. It is exclusively in reference to his intelligence that differences in ratings appear. When he is alone, 91% of the male students consider him of average intelligence while when seen with his interactant that figure shrinks to 70%. When he is alone, no male student (0%) considers him below average, while in interaction 30% give him such a low rating. Among male professionals the same holds true. When alone 60% consider him average and 33% below average while visibly in interaction the exact opposite is shown: 33% average and 60% below. Among female professionals there is virtually no difference in his intelligence rating in the two pictures. With female

students, however, he gains by being with his interactant, 80% considering him of average intelligence and only 20% below. When he is alone, the reverse holds true, with 36% average and 64% below. On no other score is there significant rater variation for the two tapes.

(2) Interactional Behavior. Behavior that is intimately related to the face-to-face interaction. Interactional behavior has two aspects. It is judged for the effectiveness of its referential function and of it regulatory function.

A classic example of the referential function is the overgesticulator. When he is alone, it is evident that his active gesticulation corresponds exactly to what he says. Of those professionals who would hire him, 25% would do so enthusiastically, and 25% without reservations. When seen with the interactant, all those that would hire him would do so with reservations (100%). When alone, 41% of all professionals consider him of outstanding intelligence, while in interaction that percentage shrinks to 11%. When he is alone, 24% consider him highly competent, while nobody (0%) thinks this of him in interaction. The judges seem to notice a conflict between the self-priming value of gesticulation and the disturbing influence of one-sided overgesticulation on the harmony of conversational interaction. The disharmony is especially blatant because the interviewer was kinesically very quiet. Nobody (0%) wants him as a personal friend or boss. Nevertheless, when seen alone, 41% might take him as an employee but only 21% would do so after seeing him with his interactant.

The kinesically still applicant is the opposite of the overgesticulator. When viewed alone, no student (0%) and only 2 professionals (11%) think of him as outstandingly intelligent. 24% of the professionals even think of him as below average while when he is alone,he falls lower in intelligence and only 65% consider him average. Although unresponsively quiet, like all the others, this applicant establishes normal eye contact and therefore is moderately adequate in the regulatory function.

The applicant who gazes in the void may be considered self reliant when seen alone by 35% of the professionals but only 11% think this of him when they see him in interaction. 65% consider him insecure when he is alone,and this figure jumps to 89% when the professionals see him in interaction.

The positively aggressive applicant is 100% successful in getting hired by the professionals on both tapes and only a single student (25) would not hire him, and this only when he was seen alone. None of the professionals (0%) would want him as a personal friend when they see him alone but when they see him in interaction 26% would want him as a friend. When viewed alone, only his forcefulness stood out. When his behavior contrasted with the reserved personality of the interviewer, it took on a dimension of dominance improper for the particular social situation.

The moderately aggressive applicant also gets himself hired by all the professionals and only two students would not hire him, but this time it is when they see him in interaction. No female student would want him as a personal friend after seeing him alone but 40% want him as their friend when they see him in interaction. His behavior did not manifest any degree of inappropriate dominance.

CONCLUSION

The intended meaning of the various applicants' behavior is evidently one and only one on both tapes. Observers's perception of many of these behaviors, however, changed depending on whether the applicant was viewed alone or within his full interactional context. It is difficult to see how semiotic theory can handle the discrepancy in the perception of an identical sign. The applicant on the tape and the raters shared the same culture and kinesic expectancies. The raters knew that there was an other member to the interaction even when he was not visibly on the screen. Physically seeing or not seeing him, however, greatly influenced their perception of the interactant to be judged. The visual image guided their imagination to emphasis on the referential function when the visual stimulus toward the regulatory function was not present. Hearing the questions to which the applicant replied and having consciousness of the fact that there was an interviewer in the actual event was not a sufficient condition for an equal evaluation of both functions. The question is whether the semiotic sign can ever be explored objectively. In sociolinguistics, the perceiver is part of the perceived. It is hoped that semiotics will pay increasing attention to the "reader".

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APPENDIX I--SCRIPT FOR THE INTERVIEW

Interviewer: What made you decide to apply to our company?
Applicant: I am interested in management and I thought that working in a department store would offer the most varied exposure. Your company is very large and therefore should have many openings.
Int.: Do you know how our company is organized?
App.: Yes, I researched it in Standard and Poor' .
Int.: That is fine. Would you mind telling me a little about yourself. What are your long and short range career goals? How will you go about obtaining them?
App.: My long range goal is to become the vice-president of a company, and possibly even president. I enjoy organizational work and I do not mind long hours. I also would like to become free of financial worries and have a good life for myself and my family. I am certain that I will reach my goal by working hard, by listening to the advice of experienced people, and by conscientiously doing what is requested of me. I also plan to keep informed on new developments in my field through the trade journals. My short term goal is to start at the bottom in a company that has a great reputation, like yours.
Int.: What is your weakest point?
App.: To tell the truth, I am a perfectionist. I always want to do everything to perfection and I might pay too much attention to details.
Int.: Are you capable of determining what is relevant and what is less essential in a task you are told to perform?
App.: Well, one of the things I learned in college was to analyze things critically and determine what is really

important. Otherwise, I would have lost too much time studying for one course and got poor grades in the others due to a lack of time.

Int.: I'd like you to take a brief look at the brochure about our store on the table before we continue.
(CAMERA CUTS AS APPLICANT STARTS LOOKING AT BROCHURE)

APPENDIX II

Name (optional)_____
Company(optional)_____

PERSONAL DATA

Sex M F (circle) Age_____
Profession: Professor___ Years of experience in
Professional Person___ personnel_____
Undergraduate Student___
Graduate Student___
Area of Concentration_____
Are you currently: working part time _____
working full time_____
job title _____
What are your career goals_____
_____

Have you ever been interviewed (circle)
1) for a part time or summer job? never 2-5 times
once 6-10 times
more than 10 times
2) for a regular, full-time job? never 2-5 times
once 6-10 times
more than 10 times

Have you ever interviewed job applicants (circle)
1) for a part time or summer job? never 2-5 times
once 6-10 times
more than 10 times
2) for a regular, full-time job? never 2-5 times
once 6-10 times
more than 10 times

Please provide below any further information you believe might be useful to us in assessing your knowledge of the interview situation. Please indicate whether you are or have been working in a personnel department or an employment agency.

APPENDIX III

RATING SHEET

Answer all the questions (1-6) from top to bottom on each column. Each column corresponds to a segment on the videotape.

1. a) Would you hire the applicant? Yes No b) If yes, would you hire the applicant a) enthusiastically c) without reservations c) with reservations

2. The applicant's intellectual capacity is a) outstanding b)average c)below average

3. The applicant appears: a) self reliant b) insecure c) overbearing

4. Does the applicant appear emotionally stable? Yes No

5. Does the applicant appear: a) highly competent b)adequately competent c) incompetent

6. Outside of any professional consideration I would like to have the applicant as: a) a personal friend b) an acquaintance c) my boss d) my employee e) never have anything to do with him.

ANSWER SHEET

	I	II	III	IV	V	VI
1)	a.___ b.___	a.___ b.___	a.___ b.___	a.___ b.___	a.___ b.___	a.___ b.___
2)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
3)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
4)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
5)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
6)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

APPENDIX IV

Professionals (n. 36)

I. OVERGESTICULATION.

		-With interactant- (F9 M10)			-Alone- (F8 M9)		
		Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
1.(a)	yes	56%-5	30%-3	42%-8	50%-4	44%-4	47%-8
	no	44%-4	70%-7	58%-11	50%-4	56%-5	53%-9
(b)	a.	0%	0%	0%	25%-1	25%-1	25%-2
	b.	0%	0%	0%	25%-1	25%-1	25%-2
	c.	100%-5	100%-3	100%-8	50%-2	50%-2	50%-4
2.	a.	11%-1	10%-1	11%-2	63%-5	22%-2	41%-7
	b.	89%-8	90%-9	89%-17	38%-3	78%-7	59%-10
	c.	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
3.	a.	22%-2	0%	11%-2	38%-3	44%-4	41%-7
	b.	22%-2	40%-4	32%-6	25%-2	11%-1	18%-3
	c.	56%-5	60%-6	58%-11	38%-3	44%-4	41%-7
4.	yes	78%-7	70%-7	74%-14	88%-7	67%-6	76%-13
	no	22%-2	30%-3	26%-5	13%-1	33%-3	24%-4
5.	a.	0%	0%	0%	38%-3	11%-1	24%-4
	b.	100%-9	80%-8	89%-17	50%-4	89%-8	71%-12
	c.	0%	20%-2	11%-2	13%-1	0%	6%-1
6.	a.	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
	b.	33%-3	20%-2	26%-5	13%-1	33%-3	24%-4
	c.	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
	d.	33%-3	10%-1	21%-4	50%-4	33%-3	41%-7
	e.	33%-3	70%-7	53%-10	38%-3	33%-3	35%-6